

Mid-Year High School Senior Writing Exemplars

One of the DASSC Writing Inquiry Group's goals was to find samples of student writing that illustrated what competent high school senior writing looks like mid-year. The following samples hint at the range of work that students need to be producing.

Finding these samples was wrought with challenges: teachers were hesitant to share student work, the samples too often were formulaic, and the range of writing was limited. As a result, the following writing is just a start. *This is work that needs to continue.*

Sample 1: Untitled

Individuality and freedom to pursue happiness in one's own way shaped the entire foundation of the United States today. We fought through years of war and overthrew dictators across the world to maintain what we counted as the most essential right of a human – liberty. Yet none of the historical sacrifices and efforts made enough of an impact if we question whether or not to conform to the rest of the world. Other nations have strict rules about which literature to study. These same countries tend to struggle with rigid government, unwanted tradition, even the distinction between right and wrong. Oh yes, the school systems tried to establish all through using specific texts, but students grew up and realized there is more out there. They wanted to enjoy all or any literature just as our Americans do. If our country truly wants to reverse all the efforts of heroes for the past two centuries, one of the best ways to do so is by choosing specific literature for our schools.

An incredible window of possibilities comes from reading. It restores the childhood creativity lost in maturity to adults and opens up doors of opportunity. Education is unarguable a major factor of success. If one studies hard enough, he or she will discover that the best books started out rejected by society. They were either too provocative, too radical, or too preposterous. Society refused to admit them into its canon, not because of content but due to lack of popularity. According to Landow, they had not achieved, "not exactly greatness, but what is more important, certainly—status and accessibility to a reading public." (Source A). Until someone brave enough to look past their controversy into their greatness, the mysteries of what the books' authors intended remained hidden. Huckleberry Finn was and still is one of these books.

Comment [MSOffice1]: Introduction that takes a broad topic and refines it, leading to a specific thesis.

Comment [MSOffice2]: Clear thesis statement

Comment [MSOffice3]: Multiple instances of parallel structure

Though the author intended for it to eliminate racism, those who misunderstood the purpose of its satire worked against its purpose. If our school systems want their students to understand books like *Huckleberry Finn*, they must encourage each student to read any work by favoring no books over others. Just as government favors no religion, districts ought to favor no book. It is time for us to find the greatness in books by allowing each student to choose what to read without the assistance of society's prejudices.

Comment [MSOffice4]: Use of sophisticated syntax

Comment [MSOffice5]: Paragraph uses specific example to build to strong argument

A teacher's job is to provide a student with the tools he or she needs to explore the world, then step back and let the student choose where to start. If every student began at the same location (English literature), life would not hold so many different philosophies and eventually students would refuse to "travel" anywhere else. Do we really want to eliminate future Einsteins and Davincis by eliminating the chance to read other books? Eschleman explains that "teachers have to make their own decisions" and that anthologies don't thoroughly address "the nature and significance of poetry" (Source C). We have to rethink the purpose of reading—is it to limit or to broaden, to skew data or to prove it, and to define greatness or to leave that an open discussion? By remaining objective to which books should be required for students to read, the school system will increase "language development, "thought processes," "respect," and "feelings of self-worth" (Source D). Isn't that what we want?

Comment [MSOffice6]: Embedded support

Comment [MSOffice7]: Strong closing argument, use of rhetorical question for purpose

Sample 2: Black Ops for Dummies

My boyfriend just bought the new *Call of Duty* all his friends have been talking about. After rushing home, he popped in the disc growing anxious as the title screen loaded and a tear filled the corner of his eye as the multiplayer option showed, he clicked on it with a smirk on his face thinking he was about to humiliate his friends at their own game. The match hasn't even started and he has already talked enough trash to get every other player to hate him. Here it is the count down. The game starts and he's dead. The next ten minutes might be the most humiliating and frustrating minutes of his life. As he finishes last, the realization dawns on him like an evening shadow, he sucks. Now after days and days of playing and experience, and probably very little sleep if any, he has come up with a few tips for beginners.

Comment [MSOffice8]: Engaging introduction suited for purpose and audience

Comment [MSOffice9]: Introduction leads to clear organizational pattern

Customize—the game allows you five slots in which you can customize your player; here is where you want to focus your attention most as you'll have to go and frequently make changes with the things you learn during game-play. For instance, you may find out which gun works well for you with which attachments. Remember that the point of this function is to allow the player to define himself and his style among the millions of other players. Make yourself comfortable with the selections that you make. My boyfriend's personal favorite is the Hardline Pro Class with jackal face paint carrying a Famas into battle.

Comment [MSOffice10]: Specific examples

Comment [MSOffice11]: s

Grenades; these will be your best friend and worst enemy as they will earn you many kills but will more likely be the reason you'll be killed. Something that I've noticed is that at the start of the battle players look into the air and throw grenades with the hopes of getting a lucky kill, although its pretty satisfying when the points pop up on your screen, a much wiser way to use your grenades would be to save them for when you're about to enter a building, because you never know who's camping in there, just waiting to shoot you down. It would smarter to throw in a tactical grenade to daze the opponent or even a lethal one to clear the area.

Comment [MSOffice12]: Clear organization for each paragraph.

Snipers and assault rifles; there are two types of maps in Black Ops, open ones for long range shots and small ones for running and gunning. It is good to keep at least one of each map in your custom slots. In order to finish on top you may want to stay elevated above the enemy. When you plan on being a sniper remember to lay a claymore in the doorway so if anyone sneaks up behind you they pay for it. And when using the running and gunning class make sure you're handy with the knife melee attack because if you ever get too close to the enemy a slice from the knife will get you a kill much quicker than your bullets. By the way many players sacrifice accuracy for damage but a bullet that can shoot through a wall will only be effective if you can hit the wall to start off with, so always go with accuracy.

Know the map; every map is different and have strategic spots that can help you gain the advantage. Top floors in buildings on the outskirts are usually great sniping areas but just remember to lay down a claymore behind you. This method is also great for building up kill streak rewards, which will be your best friend when trying to achieve a

good kill to death ratio. Lay down claymores and throw grenades strategically by finding places with the most traffic, preferably a narrow area. Study the map and the routes mostly taken by other players. Avoid direct routes as this can often lead you in a confrontation where you will be outnumbered, instead try going around the map and sneaking behind your opponents and launch surprise attacks. This can often award you with multiple kills when you run up on multiple unexpected campers facing the same direction.

Comment [MSOffice13]: Each paragraph contains specific supports. These are parallel

Combat training; although it may be boring, combat training is a great way to develop your skills before going against real players. It will allow you to become comfortable with the controls, learn your sensitivity, and even help you define your playing style. It might only take a few minutes if you're a regular gamer but if you're a total beginner like me it could take up to several days. This process trains you to quicker react to things and be aware of all of your surroundings.

Comment [MSOffice14]: Tone and diction is suited to purpose and audience

I'm certain these tips will set you off playing like a pro in no time. Practice using more useful weapons better, like the grenades and claymores I mentioned earlier. Each of the five tips I've discussed has its own importance; some will keep you aware of what's going on in the game-play, some will help you stay more alert to react and others will benefit you in being more prepared then all the other new players.

Comment [MSOffice15]: Casual voice and tone consistently maintained throughout

Most importantly, just remember that you are at war.

Comment [MSOffice16]: Conclusion ends without repeating

Comment [MSOffice17]: Strong voice throughout

Sample 3: Untitled

I know a popular guy. I have spent time observing and conversing with him. He has been my inspiration. I can now produce the four criterions a boy must meet to achieve a "top dog" mentality and the ten easy ways to accomplish this high school lifetime of stardom.

Comment [MSOffice18]: Introduction leads to clear organizational pattern.

A popular guy must be smart; book smart. After all, your ACT score is what truly defines your intelligence. Throughout your journey in high school, you must take all advanced classes. If your high school offers advanced programs such as Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or Dual Credit classes, you must take them. Taking classes that are on the lower on the totem pole implies that

Comment [MSOffice19]: Use of syntax for effect

you are not intelligent. Design a rocket, but it won't matter if you're only taking regular math. Your class choices are imperative. You must not only take said classes, but you must also ace them. As a popular guy, you must maintain a 4.0 or better. Why? Because otherwise you will have less to gloat about. Opportunity to gloat is important.

The most classic and well known way to be popular is to be social. Don't be fooled, being social requires much more than just saying hello to everyone in the hallway. Being social means that you have an incredibly large, and inclusive, circle of friends. Your friends must meet certain standards though, to be considered your friend. First, they must share the same immature thoughts and views as you do. For example, if you believe that shooting fruit through a straw and making it stick to the ceiling is comedy, you're off to a good start. Your friends must also participate in many school functions, like you do. You should participate in 3 types of activities: Academic, Extracurricular, and Sports. Being part of academic groups or clubs allows you to constantly boost your already gigantic ego. When participating in extracurricular activities like musicals or choir, be sure to be the best. Being popular means you should be the lead; the only sports you play as a popular guy, are violent ones; sports that allow you to show off your masculinity and your beastly enthusiasm. Basically, if given the opportunity to hurt others for fun, you should do it.

Your love life will be strictly maintained by your popularity. This means that everything your mom said about love being based on respect, and inner beauty, is trash now. The criteria for girls you date is as follows: they must take the same classes as you do or be in college, they must be extremely good-looking, they must be considered "popular" by others, and most importantly, your friends must approve of them. In Laymen's terms, dumb, ugly, and unpopular girls are a deal breaker. Choose wisely because in the end, the only opinions that matter are those of your friends. Consider your circle of friends; that's a lot of people to please. In the meantime, you could work on your arrogance, which is important to maintain if you're planning on being popular. Try consistently trying to get with girls who have boyfriends. Your goal will be to make them and everyone else in the room uncomfortable.

Comment [MSOffice20]: Specific details

Comment [MSOffice21]: Examples well suited for purpose and audience

Comment [MSOffice22]: Strong word choice

Comment [MSOffice23]: Use of parallel structure

Arrogance is probably your most charming attribute. It is what truly attracts people to you. To get started, you could challenge yourself to be as mean as you can, to as many people as you can. This can be done in a couple of ways. First, you could try judging people, like acquaintances or people who simply don't measure up to you, about things you know absolutely nothing about, such as why they choose to be less social than you are. These kinds of people usually stay away from you though, so an easier way to meet your challenge would be to do your favorite thing: talk about yourself and how "yourself" is far better than anyone else. It's easy; just list all of your many, perfections.

All of the things I've mentioned are important to remember. But there is one last thing you should know as you venture forth, and this is most important. You must **ALWAYS** remember that **you** are the alpha-male; you are perfect, you are the strongest person alive, and no one measures up to you. Show no weakness and you will be fine. This is the person you will be for at least the next 4 years. You're impressed already, I'm sure.

Comment [MSOffice24]: Use of tone for a purpose; strong voice

Sample: Primate-O-Phobia

Comment [MSOffice25]: Use of title

When I was six years old, my dad and grandpa took me to the zoo. At that age, the zoo was probably on my "Top Ten Coolest Things" list. I wanted to see everything; the lions, tigers, bears and, regrettably, the monkeys. The baboons were in a pen completely enclosed by glass and base of rocks. The baboons were running around doing their thing—throwing poop and such—while the on-looking humans watched in giddy amusement. I was six, I was small, and I wanted a better look. The rocks provided a perfect little seat so I climbed up, bearing a toothy grin, which was soon replaced with heart wrenching fear. Almost instantly a baboon went from chasing his playful brother to sprinting at me, howling ear piercing screams of war and pounding on the glass which prohibited it from devouring my flesh. That's probably an overreaction, but it was terrifying. Needless to say, my six year old self was traumatized.

Comment [MSOffice26]: Strong word choice

Comment [MSOffice27]: Use of imagery

A few years later when I was in fourth grade, my class did a whole learning unit on monkeys and I learned some pretty useful facts. Apes are very territorial. It's best not to ever look them in the eye because they take it as a threat and want to fight. This would have been useful information when I was six, although I can't say for sure that I would have retained such information at that age. Second, apes are the closest animals to humans, and quite frankly, it's creepy. They have hands that are just like ours. This means they are capable of many of the same forms of assault, i.e. choking. An ape can harm me in the same ways I can harm an ape, only they have the upper hand in strength, speed and their sharp teeth.

That being said, I was in my freshman year of high school when I had another terrifying encounter with an ape. I went to the zoo with my friends Andrea and Sean and, of course, they were gung-ho about see the Gorillas. As you can imagine, I had to pass up the chance. I could have lived the rest of my life not seeing a Gorilla but as the fates would have it I ended up having to go fetch my friends out of there because they were taking so long. This was a terrible mistake on my part. Upon entering the cave like viewing room, I saw a Gorilla who was probably 3 times my size. Don't look him in the eye, don't look him in the eye I said over and over in my head, but naturally the moment I lost my concentration and looked up was the moment the Gorilla did too and our eyes met. In a flash that Gorilla was off his gigantic butt and thrusting himself at the only barrier between us, the glass. I was in tears when I ran out, and I didn't care if my friends were with me or not. I just need to run far, far away.

As we toured the rest of the park, I saw a few other types of apes and was appalled that some of them were not caged affectively to protect visitors; like me. The Spider Monkeys for example, are enclosed in a pen made entirely of wire and rope and they just swing around at high speeds. It's a disaster looking for a place to happen in my opinion. I sit around sometimes and just wonder how long before I hear that someone was mauled to death by a Spider Monkey. It's bound to happen.

I haven't been to the zoo, at least not for recreational pleasure, in years and I can honestly admit that the apes are like a repellant to me. I'm literally traumatized by the thought of monkeys. My experiences have caused many boundaries in my life to

Comment [MSOffice28]: Sophisticated transition

Comment [MSOffice29]: Uses a variety of sentence structures and lengths

Comment [MSOffice30]: Use of font for special effect

form regardless of how irrational some boundaries may seem. I cannot watch movies that are based on monkeys like King Kong and Planet of the Apes. To be honest, that little Capuchin Money off of Night at the Museum gives me the chills. I can't look at pictures of monkeys, I really don't enjoy talking about them. My fear of monkeys has literally affected my entire life.

Comment [MSOffice31]: Use of specific details

Comment [MSOffice32]: Strong voice throughout

Resources

Journal articles:

Addison, Joanne and Sharon James McGee. "Writing in High School/Writing in College: Research Trends and Future Directions," *College Composition and Communication*. 62:1 (2010): 147-179.

Brockman, Elizabeth, David L. Taylor, MaryAnn K. Crawford, and Melinda Kreth. "Helping Students Cross the Threshold: Implications from a University Writing Assessment." *English Journal* 99.3 (2010): 42-49.

Fanetti, Susan, Kathy M. Bushrow, and David L. DeWeese. "Closing the Gap between High School Writing Instruction and College Writing Expectations." *English Journal* 99.4 (2010): 77-83.

Sommers, Nancy and Laura Saltz. "The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year." *College Composition and Communication*. 56:1 (2004): 124-149.

Books and Pamphlets:

Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing. National Council of Teachers of English: Urbana, Illinois, 2011.

National Writing Project and Carl Nagin. *Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools*. Jossey Bass: San Francisco, CA, 2003.

Sullivan, Patrick, Howard Tinberg, and Sheridan Blau, eds. *What is "College-Level" Writing? Volume 2*. National Council of Teachers of English: Urbana, Illinois, 2010.

Thompson, Thomas C., ed. *Teaching Writing in High School and College: Conversations and Collaborations*. National Council of Teachers of English: Urbana, IL. 2002.

Tinberg, Howard and Patrick Sullivan, eds. *What is "College-Level" Writing?* National Council of Teachers of English: Urbana, Illinois, 2006.

Endnotes: